

The Bonnie Earle o' Moray.

MORAY! The name raises up before our mind's eye a host of interesting memories of the brightest and purest figures in Scottish chivalry. Yet these very remembrances are saddened, though not dimmed, when we recal how often the Nemesis of fate has sought a Moray for its victim.

There was the "Fierce Randolph," nephew of the Bruce, a mighty man of war, raging and uncontrollable as a mountain torrent, but brave and fearless as a lion, a soldier whose worth and exploits are warped into the woof of Scotland's history, and appear transcendently brighter and tenfold more interesting to the people of the Kingdom from the fact that, five hundred and seventy years ago, he was Baron of Aberdour. No place have we here to recount his heroic deeds. Ross says that when he died—poisoned, it is believed, by an Anglican monk—he was universally lamented as an incorruptible Regent, a brave soldier, a wise statesman, and a noble-hearted man. His bones rest beside those of his patriot uncle in Dunfermline—truly a fitting place for such honoured dust!

Randolph's two sons both fell in battle and found soldiers' graves. And who has not heard or read of his daughter? Black Agnes she was, that famous heroine who, in the absence of her lord, the Earl of March, gallantly and successfully defended Dunbar Castle against the attacks of the English under the Earl of Salisbury, and showed her unbounded contempt for them by bidding her maids wipe the dust off the

walls with a towel when the great stones from the Southron catapults alighted thereon.

She kept a stir in tower and trench,
That brawling, boisterous Scottish wench ;
Came I early, came I late,
I found Agnes at the gate.

The Wizard of the North, too, makes mention of the Morays in the "Lady of the Lake," when Malise, as if to emphasise the seer's prophetic warning, says to Roderick Dhu—

At Doune o'er many a glancing blade
Two baron's banners well displayed
I saw, and hurrying to the war
The gallant Moray's silver star.

Then there was James Stuart, Earl of Moray, whose virtues and talents and fame are written on brass, as well they should be, and whom we know, and whom future generations shall know and affectionately remember by the honoured name of the Good Regent, as he certainly was—a great and good man, *sans peur et sans reproche*. Everybody knows how he was prematurely laid low by an assassin's bullet in 1570 as he marched through the streets of Linlithgow.

Sacred and touching also is the memory of the "Bonnie Earle," the Regent's son-in-law, whose nonpareil comeliness and matchless accomplishments brought down upon his head a nest of hornets whom nothing would satisfy but the blood of the innocent young Knight.

Sir James Balfour, in his "Annales of Scotland," relates the story of the Earl's murder, but even there it is told imperfectly. He says :—

"The 7 of Februarij this zeire, 1592, the Earle of Murray was cruelly murdered by the Earle of Huntly, at his house in Dunibrissell, in Fyffeshyre, and with him Dumber, Shriffe of Murray ; it [was] given out, and publickly talked, that the Earle of Huntly was only the instrument of perpetrating this

facte [deed], to satisfie the Kinges jelsie of Murray, quhom the Queine, more rashlie than wyslie, some dayes before had commedit in the Kinges heiringe, with too many epithetts of a proper and gallant man."

The tragic event is preserved in the old ballad entitled "The Bonnie Earle o' Moray":—

Ye Highlan'ls and ye Lowlands,
 Oh, whare hae ye been ?
 They hae slain the Earle o' Moray,
 And lain him on the green.

"Now, wae be to thee, Huntly !
 And wherefore did ye sae ?
 I bade you bring him wi' you,
 But forbade you him to slay."

He was a braw gallant,
 And he rade at the ring ;
 And the bonnie Earle o' Moray—
 Oh ! he might hae been a king.

He was a braw gallant,
 And he play'd at the ba' ;
 And the bonnie Earle o' Moray
 Was the flower among them a'.

He was a braw gallant,
 And he play'd at the glove ;
 And the bonnie Earle o' Moray—
 Oh ! he was the Queen's luv.

Oh ! lang will his lady
 Look frae the Castle Doune
 Ere she see the Earle o' Moray
 Come sounding through the town.

Another ballad, not nearly so meritorious as the one just quoted, commemorates the same event. In it the Earl is spoken of as Huntly's brother-in-law. The Marquis visits Moray while he is staying at Donibristle, and the gates are unsuspectingly

opened to receive the guest who turns out, as in fact he is, a
 "fause traitor."

Open the gates and let him come in ;
 He's my brother Huntly, he'll do him nae harm.

He's ben, and ben, and ben to his bed,
 And wi' a sharp rapier he stabbed him dead.

The lady cam' doon the stair, wringin' her hands—
 "He has slain Lord Moray, the flower o' Scotland."

But Huntly lap on his horse, rade to the king ;
 "Ye're welcome hame, Huntly, whaur hae ye been ?

Whaur have ye been, and how hae ye sped ?"
 "I've killed the Earl o' Moray dead in his bed."

"Foul fa' ye, Huntly, and why did ye so ?
 Ye micht hae ta'en Moray, and saved his life too."

Her bread is to bake, her yill is to brew ;
 My sister's a widow, and sair do I rue.

Her corn grows ripe, her meadows are green,
 But in bonnie Dinnibristle I daurna be seen.

This version of the heinous crime, we know, is altogether erroneous. How far the monarch was connected with the murder we shall see later on. Young Moray was not slain in bed. The old house of Donibristle, with its magnificent environments, stood on a gentle eminence looking proudly over the placid waters of the Firth of Forth. When Huntly arrived at Donibristle House and asked the Earl to surrender in the King's name, Moray refused, and a conflict between the two parties ensued. Huntly set the house on fire, and the young lord had the bleak alternative of sallying forth and running the chance of death by the sword or of being burned alive. Dunbar, whom we have already mentioned, came to the rescue. With the most heroic self-sacrifice he offered to lay down his life for his master. "I will go," he said, "out at the gate before your

Lordship, and I am sure the people will charge on me, thinking me to be your Lordship, and, under cover of the darkness, ye shall come out after me and try to defend yourself."

No sooner said than done. Dunbar rushed forth. During the broil with the noble servant the Earl managed to burst through the assailants, and made for the cliffs which lay below. Unfortunately his tippet had caught fire in the sally, and this circumstance betrayed his whereabouts to his bloodthirsty enemies. "They came doune on him on a suddaine," remarks the historian with quaint graphicness, "and ther most cruelly, without mercy, murdered him." Gordon of Buckie struck the initial blow, and then compelled Huntly to perform his share of the tragedy, at which the craven knight plunged his dagger ruthlessly into the face of his victim, who calmly upbraided him for spoiling a better face than his own. The brave Dunbar also fell covered with wounds. Buckie, says Archbishop Spottiswood, was immediately despatched to advertise the king of what had happened, while Huntly himself fled speedily northwards, leaving Captain Gordon, his cousin, lying on the ground severely wounded. Next day the captain was taken to Edinburgh and publicly executed for his share in the tragedy.

The question arises, what was the real cause of the Bonnie Earle's death? And here, let me say, we tread on debatable ground. Historians and ballad-makers both are at variance over the solution. It seems to me that it was very much like a repetition, secularly, of course, of the death scene of Thomas à Becket. You remember how Henry II., when he heard of the acclamations with which the people of England received the exiled archbishop on his return, exclaimed, in a burst of fury which soon spent itself, "Is there none of the cowards that eat my bread who will free me from this turbulent priest?" The desire at once became the deed. You are aware of the dramatic result: ere many days had passed Becket was no more.

Nobles thirsting for vengeance, and waiting eagerly for a stray word to fall from their prince's lips, which would enable them

to wreak that vengeance, and yet stamp it with a goodly show of lawfulness—that was the cause of Becket's death ; that too, methinks, was the cause of the Earl of Moray's tragic end.

To understand Huntly's part in the tragedy—and, in our opinion, he was the principal actor—it is necessary to bear in mind the Bonnie Earle's relation to the Good Regent. He had married, as has been hinted, the Regent's elder daughter Elizabeth, and, through her, acquired those vast possessions which belonged to the Earldom of Moray, thereby laying himself open to the enemies of his father-in-law. We must now go back a generation. In 1562, at the battle of Corrichie, in Aberdeenshire, the Regent Moray had all but annihilated the Huntlyan clan, the old Earl himself being killed. The family feuds had not yet subsided ; there were embers burning low which required only a little stirring up, and Huntly was the man to do it. Just then he stood in high favour with James VI., and the vulture was on the lookout for the shot—in this case the word—which would seal his rival's doom. Moray had given refuge to the Earl of Bothwell—"Clydesdale's ancient lord"—who had been guilty of treason, and this was made the excuse for Huntly being sent to arrest him.

Assuredly the Aberdonian went a step too far, for, when news of the iniquitous crime spread throughout the country, loud cries of revenge arose. Many hearts bled softly, and many eyes were dimmed with tears, for the Bonnie Earle was much beloved by the common people. There were murmurings of rebellion, and James thought it advisable in the circumstances to go to Glasgow for safety.

The testimony of contemporaries, however, is always strong, and there were not wanting those who asserted that jealousy on the part of the King was the real cause of the murder. This may seem ridiculous. James had a face as incomparable with that of the Bonnie Earle as—well ! as east is from west, and therefore could experience no pangs of jealousy in beauty's line. Yet perhaps on one occasion he had been piqued by some

remark of his Queen, who certainly thought a good deal of the young nobleman, and a stray word let fall, you know, may topple down mighty kingdoms. If some such word did escape the Queen's lips, and unleash the bloodhounds who were waiting for their prey, the beautiful old ballad of "Young Waters" may refer, as has been conjectured, to the fate of the unfortunate Earl.

The only difficulty is that in this ballad the knight is taken to the Heading Hill of Stirling, and there meets his doom: otherwise there seems every possible reconciliation between it and the Earl's life, only Moray was not the king's sister's son, but the king's cousin-in-law. Ballads, as everybody knows, in their march from mouth to mouth become distorted: reciters have their likes and dislikes; here a stanza is interpolated, or another is omitted, to suit the taste, and the poem is expanded, or cringed, as the case may be. Putting two and two together, Queen Anne's "ill-waled words" were at the root of the tragedy, and the "wily Lord" Huntly was but too anxious to take the monarch at his word, and immediately set off on his nefarious mission. Such was the general and openly expressed opinion of the people at the time, and Balfour, who ought to know more about the incident than we, writes:—

"The ressons of these surmises proceidit from proclamations of the Kinges, the 18 of March following, inhibitting the younge Earle of Moray to persew the Earle of Huntly for his father's slaughter, in respecte he, being wardit in the castell of Blacknesse, was willing to abyde his tryell; averring that he had done nothing, but by the King's commissione; and so was neither airt nor pairt of the murther."

After a time Huntly was set at liberty, and things went on again as if nothing had happened. Meanwhile, however, the Earl's mother, Lady Doune, had the two bodies put in coffins and conveyed over to Leith, intending to carry them through the streets of Edinburgh, accompanied by a banner on which was represented the naked body of her son, with a cloth round

the loins, and showing the gaping wounds he had received. Out of the mouth of the murdered nobleman issued a scroll, bearing this inscription:—"GOD AVENGE MY CAUSE; Feb. 7, 1591. Aetat. 24." James, however, hearing of the intention, commanded the magistrates of Leith to take possession of the bodies. For divers months they remained unburied; but at last the earth reclaimed its own again, yet no man knoweth where the Earl's sepulchre is unto this day.

Such was the sad fate of the "Bonnie Earle o' Moray." The dark, wild, restless sea of rage and enmity had swept over his noble head, and brought his bright locks to an early grave. On the threshold of manhood he was cut down by felon strokes, but posterity has enshrined his name in loving hearts.

Thou wert faithful, thou wert brave,
But not truth might shield thee
From a false and shuffling knave.

